

Hand. 244.

A
S E R M O N

PREACHED AT
WHITEHALL CHAPEL,
AT THE
CONSECRATION
OF THE

RIGHT REVEREND FATHER IN GOD
BEILBY, Lord Bishop of CHESTER,
ON SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 9, 1777.

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By JOHN BRIGGS, M. A.

PUBLISHED BY COMMAND OF
HIS GRACE THE LORD ARCHBISHOP
OF YORK.

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M.DCC.LXXVII.

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WHITTHALL CHAPEL

CONGREGATION

FOR THE FUTURE OF THE CHURCH

By the Lord Bishop of Chester
ON SUNDAY 10th 1877



BY JOHN B. B. G. M. A.

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M.DCC.LXXVII.

First Epistle of TIMOTHY, iii Chap.

Part of the 14th, 15th, and 16th Verses.

*These Things write I unto Thee—
that Thou mayest know how to behave
Thyself in the House of God, which
is the Church of the Living God; the
Pillar, and Ground of the Truth.
And, without Controversy, great is
the Mystery of Godliness.*

THE Things which the Apostle wrote to Timothy, whom he had before appointed Bishop of Ephesus, relate to the Exercise of his Episcopal Function, in one of its principal Acts, the Ordination of Ministers for the Service of the Church.

The preceding Verses of this Chapter contain Directions for his Conduct in that Particular ; specifying the Kind of Persons, to whom he should commit so important a Trust ; and enumerating the Qualities requisite for a worthy and successful Discharge of it.

The Grounds of his Care, concerning the proper Choice and Appointment of Ministers, for the Service of the Church, are implied in its being the “ Church of the Living God ; the “ Pillar and Ground of the Truth.”

It was the *Divine Original*, and the infinite Importance of the Christian Religion ; it was the Cause of Truth, of Virtue, and of eternal Happiness that animated his Zeal ; and dictated the Use of those Means which he knew
were

were necessary to its Advancement and Support.

But there seems to have been another Cause of his Sollicitude for the due Appointment of Ministers, arising from the very *Nature* of the Christian Dispensation; as may be inferred from the Verse immediately following, “ And without Controversy great is the Mystery of Godliness.”

How, and in what Respects, the Gospel is the great Mystery of Godliness, appears sufficiently for our present Purpose, from the Apostle’s subsequent Illustration of his Assertion: “ God was manifest in the Flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of Angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the World, received up into Glory.”

The Connection of this Passage with the Subject of the preceding Discourse, to which it is joined, and of which it forms the Conclusion, does not indeed, at first Sight, seem very obvious; but it can refer to nothing else, and is agreeable enough to the Apostle's usual Manner.

Comprehending, as it were at one View, the Whole of the Subject under his Contemplation, he presses forwards to the main Point; leaving it very frequently to the Sagacity of those to whom he addresses himself, to trace the Path, and to investigate the intermediate Steps that led to it. A Circumstance that contributes, perhaps, more than any Thing else, to the Obscurity which we sometimes meet with in his Writings.

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The *Divine Original*, therefore, and the *mysterious Nature*, of the Christian Dispensation, are the Two Grounds, from whence the Apostle infers the Necessity of a distinct Order of Men, duly appointed, and properly qualified, for the Work of the Ministry.

And there can be no Doubt, if the Gospel be “ the Power of God and “ the Wisdom of God unto Salvation,” but that it is worthy of being universally embraced.

It is plain likewise, that if it be of so mysterious a Nature, as to exceed in several Instances the Comprehension, and to contradict the Prejudices of mere Human Wisdom; at the same Time that its Precepts thwart the strongest Propensities, and the most inveterate Habits, of Human Depravity:

“ If Christ crucified be to the Jews a
 “ stumbling Block, and to the Greeks
 “ Foolishness ;” it is plain, I say, that
 the Cause of Christianity is, in this
 Respect, under peculiar Disadvantages ;
 for the Removal of which peculiar
 Lights and Helps are required.

And how are these to be supplied,
 or the Gospel to be diffused thro’ the
 World, but by the Labours of Minis-
 ters, duly commissioned, and properly
 qualified, for that Purpose ? “ How
 “ shall Men call on him in whom they
 “ have not believed ; and how shall
 “ they believe in him of whom they
 “ have not heard ; and how shall they
 “ hear without a Preacher ; and how
 “ shall they preach except they be
 “ sent ?”

In the first Ages of Christianity this
 was

was evidently impossible. Not only Teachers, but Teachers invested with supernatural Powers, were necessary to gain it an Establishment. Such Powers were in fact granted to the Apostles and their immediate Successors, and the mighty Effects of them were visible in the sudden and amazing Growth of Christianity. Hence two very different Inferences may be drawn. From the Cessation of those Powers, it may perhaps be concluded, that a Ministry, destitute of such extraordinary Demonstrations of the Spirit, is inadequate to the End of its Institution, and therefore useless. On the other Hand, from the Consideration of the present Establishment of Christianity; from its Authority being acknowledged, and its Doctrines known, such an Order of Men may now possibly be thought superfluous.

But

But both these Objections vanish, when we consider, in regard to the former of them, that the proper End and Use of these Miracles, was to give *Authority* to Revelation; and they are therefore no longer necessary, when *that* is fully established. Add to this, that those divine Powers with which the first Preachers of the Gospel were invested, did not even then supersede the Use of human Means. To the Miracles adduced as Credentials of their Mission, they constantly joined the ordinary Labours of the Ministry; together with all those prudential Observances, and all those virtuous Arts of Address and Insinuation, which might procure it Credit and Favour, and Success.

In regard to the other Objection, which supposes the Institution of a
Christian

Christian Ministry to be no longer necessary, now that Christianity is so well established, its Authority acknowledged, and its Doctrines known, let it be remembered, that it is not Ignorance or Error alone which the Gospel has to contend with, nor the Conviction of the Understanding only, which will keep Men stedfast to their Faith and Duty. The Christian Religion is a Rule of Action, as well as a System of Belief; and it is chiefly the Weakness and Imperfection of Human Nature, the Depravity and Corruption of the Heart, that make Men deviate from it. It is that "Law
 " in our Members, warring against the
 " Law of our Minds, that brings us
 " into Captivity to the Law of Sin."
 And these are peculiar to no Age or Country.

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The Reasons therefore why God gave
 “ some Apostles, and some Prophets, and
 “ some Evangelists, and some Pastors and
 “ Teachers, namely, for the perfecting
 “ of the Saints, for the Work of the
 “ Ministry, for the edifying of the
 “ Body of Christ,” do still subsist, and
 must remain in Force, as long as Men
 shall continue to be weak, and frail,
 and perverse; attached to vain Plea-
 sures, and unmindful of their best In-
 terests.

Whoever attends to the Operations
 of the Human Mind, or to their visible
 Effects on Human Actions, will easily
 perceive, that though Happiness be the
 universal Pursuit of Mankind, it is not
 always the Weight and Importance of
 the Object, even according to their own
 Estimation of its Value, which deter-
 mines their Choice.

In

In the main Interests even of this Life, there are not many who steadily pursue what their sober Judgment approves ; but in the great Concerns of another, Reason and Conduct are at a still greater, and more frequent Variance. Men see and acknowledge, that the Things of this World are not worthy to be compared with the Glory that shall be hereafter ; and yet, with this Conviction upon their Minds, they could be contented to set up their Staff, and make their Abode here, where they have no continuing City ; and, in their Anxiety to provide the little Accommodations of the present State, would bury all Care and Thought of their eternal Inheritance in that which is to come.

And the Reason is plain ; it is founded in the different Impressions
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that Things near or distant make upon us. " The Things that are temporal " are seen ;" are perpetually forcing themselves upon our Notice, and soliciting our Passions. " The Things " that are eternal are not seen ;" they are visible to the Eye of Faith only, and have no present Gratifications to offer. Hence the *Greatness* is almost lost in the *Remoteness* of their Advantages, and the Influence they ought to have upon us is diminished in the same Proportion.

To remove, as far as possible, these Obstacles to a Christian Life; to counteract the Advantages which Temporal Things have over Spiritual, from their being seen ; and to induce Men " to " walk by Faith, and not by Sight ;" it is necessary that their Attention should frequently be recalled to the
great

great Concerns of a future State, and the comparative Worthlessness of all secular Interests; that the Evidence and the Importance of the Christian Religion, which worldly Cares and Pleasures are so apt to hide from their View, should often be brought home to them, and kept alive in their Hearts, by such Arguments as are calculated to awaken the Hopes, and alarm the Fears of Men; that they be animated to the Love, and confirmed in the Habits, of Piety and Virtue, by Persuasion and Example, by holy Exercises, and by stated, regular, and frequent Acts of Devotion.

In all these natural Means of Christian Edification the necessary Instrumentality of the Ministry is evident. The habitual Inattention of Men, im-

merfed in worldly Cares, to the moft obvious and important Truths, which would difturb their favourite Purfuits ; and the Neceffity there is, that they fhould frequently be awakened to a Senfe of what they cannot but know, if they will give themfelves Leave to reflect, needs not be told.

The *Shortnefs* and *Uncertainty* of *Human Life*, is a Confideration that could not, one would think, but force itfelf upon their Minds ; and yet the Prophet is bid to “ cry aloud, that all “ Flefh is Grafs, and all the Goodli- “ nefs thereof as the Flower of the “ Field.” He is bid to cry aloud, intimating both the Importance of the Thing, and the general Stupidity of Men, in not confidering it.

The Events that are to fucceed this

short Life, in Comparifon of which even Life itfelf is of no Moment, are not fo obvious. The Myftery of Man's Redemption, and his future Exiftence in Glory, Confiderations whence Humanity derives its beft Confolations, and Virtue its beft Support, are not fuch Truths as, to gain Affent, need only to be propofed. They are not the Objects of Senfe and Experience, nor even the Deductions of the uninformed Underftanding; they are not discoverable by natural Reafon, nor fully to be comprehended by it, even when they are revealed.

If therefore the Voice of a Prophet was required to remind Men of fo obvious a Truth as that of their own Mortality, there is a ftill greater Need of Monitors, to rouse and to fix their Attention on thofe Truths that are,

at the same Time, both more important, and less obvious: of Teachers to explain, to confirm, to enforce, with an holy Zeal, the Reason of our Christian Hope; to exhort, to reprove, to persuade; to preach the Word, and minister the Ordinances of God; to offer up the Prayers and Praises of Men, united in the same Faith; in a Word, to keep up, by their various Labours and Endowments, the Sense and Influence of Christianity in the World.

To the natural Efficacy of these Means of spiritual Edification, of which the Ministry are the necessary Instruments, we may add the Assistance of the Holy Spirit; annexed by the Divine Promise, to the Labours of those who teach, in Christ's Name, the Things that he has commanded, to the End of the World.

It

It must however be acknowledged that, with all these Advantages, the Morals of Christians fall greatly short of that Standard of Perfection, held out to us by the Gospel.

To enumerate at large the Causes of this small Proficiency, under such ample Means of Improvement, would lead me too far. But should any one from thence be disposed to draw Arguments against the Institution of a Christian Ministry; should he deem their Function unprofitable, or their Labours useless, because unable to stem the Torrent of Ungodliness, that breaks in upon us; let him first consider the Nature and Power of the various Obstacles opposed to a general, or complete Reformation of Manners; and he will not wonder that such an Event, if at all to be expected, should

be brought about by slow Degrees; nor that the Causes which produce it should, in their Operation, be silent, and, except in their general Effects, imperceptible.

Let him next attend to the Reality and to the Value of those salutary Changes in the Manners of Mankind, which have actually taken Place, in Proportion as the Gospel has been diffused among them; let him, from these united Considerations, appreciate those Labours, to the Agency of which, we contend these Benefits are principally to be ascribed; and let him do Justice to that Institution, which has conferr'd so much Good upon Society, before he blames it, for not having done all, that might have been expected from it.

Corrupt

Corrupt and wicked as the Christian World is, or as Declamation and Satire represent it, we need not decline a Comparifon with Heathen Morals at this, or at any former Period. That we excell them, is not indeed fo much a Cause of Glorifying, as it is of Reproach, that with our infinitely fuperior Advantages, we excell them no more. But the Question being fimply the comparative Purity of Manners, of the Christian and Heathen World, we cannot be fo partial to them, or fo fevere to ourfelves, as to determine in Favour of that Side, where, together with all the common Vices of Christians, we find the Prevalence of Customs peculiarly fhocking to Virtue, Nature, and Humanity.

That many of the Enormities practifed in the Heathen World without

Remorse and without Shame are held in Abhorrence ; that a Spirit of Love and Charity, of Moderation and Humanity, of Equity and Justice is gone forth ; that the general Intercourse of Mankind is upon the Whole conducted by more virtuous Maxims, and the State of Society more happy, in Proportion as the Gospel has been known, cannot be denied. The superior Mildness and Humanity of modern Manners, has been a favorite Subject of Panegyric, even with those who are willing to ascribe it to any Thing, rather than to its true Cause, the Progress of Christianity.

But in vain does the impartial Observer look for the Cause of this salutary Change, where it is often said to be. In the alledged Improvements of Science, Arts, or Commerce, he sees
no

no other Efficacy, than what they may have accidentally acquired, by opening the Way, or preparing the Minds of Men, to adopt it. Arts and Commerce have, in their own Nature, plainly no Tendency to produce such an Event; and as to Science, that Branch of it I mean which relates to Morals, and which alone can be supposed to have contributed thereto, in what does the modern Superiority consist?

In other Parts of Science where Time and Accident have produced new Discoveries, and furnished new Lights, great Improvements are made. But in the Science of the Human Mind, where such Discoveries can have no Place, there is nothing to induce us to think, that the reasoning Powers of Mankind have not always been the

same; have not always led them to know the Nature and Bounds, and to acknowledge the Utility and Dignity, of Virtue. Those Works that still remain on moral Duties, written before the Appearance of Christianity, or in an Ignorance of it, are surpassed by none that have succeeded them; I do not say in Elegance of Composition only, but in a thorough and just Comprehension of the Subject. And it will, I believe, be very difficult to produce a single Instance, in which modern Philosophy has improved on these Institutes of Heathen Morality, except in those Particulars that are borrowed from the Gospel.—The Truth is, it was not so much the Superstructure, as the Foundation of Heathen Morality, that was defective; and, in that respect, Philosophy has nothing of its own, that can add to its Strength and Stability,

Stability. It is only in Christianity, to enforce the Practice of moral Virtue, by the Sanctions of future Rewards and Punishments.

When therefore that salutary Revolution of Manners, which has taken Place since the Gospel has been diffused, is ascribed to the Progress of Science; if *Science in general* be thereby meant, it is to say what is nothing to the Purpose; if the Assertion be confined to *that Branch of Science which relates to Morals*, it is to say what is not true,

The plain Cause why the Effects produced by Reason in Days and Regions of Heathenism, have been so little, and under the Establishment of Christianity, so general, can only be found in that Institution, which is
both

both Light and Strength to the Understanding.

The peculiar Advantages of Christianity over Paganism, in this Respect, result not only from the Greatness of its Sanctions, but also from the Instrumentality of those Means of moral Improvement, by which it is distinguished from every other religious Establishment, either of ancient or modern Times; the Appointment, I mean, of an Order of Men to inculcate the Knowledge and Influence of religious Truth, and moral Virtue.

The ancient Heathens had no such Order. They had Priests who administered the absurd Ceremonies of their Religion; but it was no Part of their Business to inculcate Morality. They
 2 were

were not distinguished from the rest of the People by a learned or virtuous Education, to qualify them for such an Office. A greater Strictness of Life, or Purity of Manners, or Decency of Character, which are found so necessary to procure to moral and religious Truths a favourable Reception, was not even expected from them. On the contrary, their very Religion taught them Wickedness. Their most solemn Mysteries were Mysteries of Iniquity; and their Deities themselves the Patrons and Examples of the most odious Vices, and the most detestable Impurities. Infomuch that the Legislature was obliged to interpose its Authority, and *Laws* were made to restrain the *Licentiousness of Religion*.

The religious Establishments of modern Times are all, except the Christian,

tian, chargeable with similar Defects. In none of them is it the Business of any Order of Men, to inculcate moral Virtue, which is certainly the practical, and most material Part of Religion. Even among the Jews, the Office of the Priesthood, both according to its original Institution, and present Practice, is almost entirely confined to ritual Observances; to the offering Atonements for their own Sins, and those of the People; or, to Prayers for Blessings, and Praise for Mercies and Deliverances. The Things which they are commanded to teach, relate chiefly to these Objects; whilst stated Admonitions and Lectures on moral Duties, enforced by religious Considerations, are almost unknown among them.

The Objects of a Christian Ministry,
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the Choice of Ministers, and their Employment are very particularly specified in the Epistle from whence my Text is taken. And they are all reducible to such Things as have the greatest Tendency to diffuse the Sense and Influence and to promote the Honour of the Gospel; either by the Piety, the Virtue, the Knowledge, the Diligence, or the Prudence of its Ministers, in their various Ranks and Departments.

From these Virtues and Qualities it is that they derive their chief Power of doing Good, or of answering, in any tolerable Degree, the End of their Institution.

The Considerations deducible from thence in regard to the outward State and Discipline of the Church are various
and

and important. In that Number are these that follow :

That its Ministers should have a regular, learned, and virtuous Education. That they should be ordained to their Ministry by some solemn Act. That they should have a sufficient Maintenance to disengage them from secular Cares, and to keep them above Want and Contempt. That there should be Authority to enforce upon them the Duties of their Profession, to censure the Unworthy, and to remove the Incurable. — From hence likewise might be shewn the Mischief of Self-appointed, itinerant Preachers ; the Necessity of different Orders of Ministers ; and the Impossibility of, what some Men seem to wish, an Equality in the Church either of Rank or Revenue.

On

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On some of these Topics it was my Intention to have enlarged. But it is Time that I give Place to the proper Business of this Day's Solemnity ; beseeching the Almighty to prosper it to the Edification of his Church in Faith, in Piety, and in Virtue.

T H E E N D.

On some of these Topics it was my
intention to have enlarged. But it is
Time that I give to the proper
Business of this Society; be-
lieving the Almighty to prosper it to
Lately published, by the same Author,

TWO DISCOURSES

ON THE

N A T U R E

OF

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